



BI-WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS

February 3-February 17, 2008

NOMINATION FOR DIRECTOR OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE MEMO

Supporting Afghanistan's Accession to the South Asia Free Trade Agreement:

On March 3rd, Afghanistan will sign the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), an organization representing six other regional countries. The Minister of Commerce & Industries, Amin Farhang, will sign the agreement on behalf of the country. After obtaining membership to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in April 2007, a prerequisite for joining SAFTA, Afghanistan began providing the SAARC Secretariat with data and information for SAFTA accession. The Ministry of Commerce and Industries Foreign Trade Directorate, with USAID assistance, provided the Secretariat with a sensitive list of products that Afghanistan seeks to protect, a list of Afghanistan's service-sector businesses, and letters on technical trade topics for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs responses to SAARC.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Afghan Carpets Take Las Vegas by Storm:

USAID organized Afghan participation in a trade show held at the World Market Center in Las Vegas, Nevada from January 28-February 1. Four businesses from the carpet sector were participated and sold \$350,000 worth of carpets at the show itself and signed contracts for at least another \$1.25 million. The U.S. Department of Commerce was an active partner in the show, as was the Export Promotion Agency of Afghanistan. The purpose of the Afghan traders' participation at the exhibition was to attract international buyers to the Afghan handcrafts. Last month, USAID and the Export Promotion Agency of Afghanistan sent 28 Afghan carpet producers to the Domotex carpet trade show in Hanover, Germany. The show generated more than \$5.2 million in export deals and Mr. Haji Nabi, owner of Zinnat Carpets, took home the award for Best Modern Carpet Design.



Domotex carpet trade show, Hanover, Germany.

PHOTO: USAID/ASMED/DAI

Young Afghans Gain Important Business Skills: At a ceremony at the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul on Sunday, February 3rd, 63 interns received certificates of completion from USAID & Washington State University. Thirty-five of the 63 graduates received permanent job offers from their sponsors including Roshan Telecom, Coca Cola, & Brac Afghanistan Bank. All interns were 4th year economics, science, and agriculture students at Kabul University. They successfully completed a three month pre-placement training in accounting & management at the Afghan Institute of Business Management. The objective of internship training is to develop students' business acumen to enable them to work in government and



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

AFGHANISTAN

BI-WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS

February 3-February 17, 2008

non-government agencies. In 2008, the program will seek to double the number of participants to 120 student interns. Through this program, 50% of the students have found employment. "I've studied a lot in administration, accounting, and other fields that will help me find a job" said Imamudean Sabeer, one of the participants of this program.

First Private Insurance Firm Opens: USAID, through a Global Development Alliance, is supporting the creation of the country's first private insurance provider, the Insurance Corporation of Afghanistan (ICA). USAID will work with ICA owners and managers to develop a system that packages information in ways that are complete and universally acceptable to international underwriters and re-insurers. This will result in a clearer understanding of the local insurance market on the part of international underwriters, more rapid issuance of policies, more appropriate pricing of insurance products and substantially improved investor confidence in many sectors of the economy. The Global Development Alliance partnership will assist in the development of an ICA marketing plan, as well as the due diligence process for applicants and claimants.



Religious leaders sign letters confirming that financial services are legitimate and Sharia compliant.

PHOTO: USAID/ASMED

Religious Leaders' Endorsement: The USAID supported Investment and Finance Cooperatives in Faryab, Jawzjan, Balkh, and Baghlan received letters from the religious authorities of the related provinces confirming the financial services, designed by the World Council of Credit Unions, as legitimate and Sharia compliant. To date, all of the nine USAID supported Cooperatives have received similar letters from their respective communities. Financial services include: small business and cooperative group loans (Murabaha); individual and business development savings accounts; agriculture equipment leasing (Ijara); debt consolidation loans (Qard Hasana); and deposits (Alwadiah and Mudaraba). Letters from the religious local authorities strengthen the trust built between the Cooperatives and their members and adds value to the effectiveness of the USAID economic growth activities in the field.



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

AFGHANISTAN

BI-WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS

February 3-February 17, 2008

ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

India Buys Afghan Pomegranates: The Horticulture Marketing team, working with the Subhan Traders of Mazar-i-Sharif, sold 6,000 kg of end-of-season pomegranates to India. These were produced by the Khulm Growers Association. The buyers are Big Bazaar (part of the Pantaloons Retail Company) and a fruit wholesaler named Suri AgroFresh. The Reliance Fresh Supermarket Company in India and Makro Supermarkets in Karachi, Pakistan also made offers on the same goods, thus providing a sales fall-back should the first deals fall through.



Packing pomegranates in Kandahar.

PHOTO: USAID

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

New Court Administration System Improves Case Management:

The newly developed, USAID-funded Afghanistan Court Administration System is now active in all 36 courts in Parwan and Kabul provinces, including the Supreme Court. The system was approved by the Supreme Court in September and is designed to offer a simpler, more open and consistent process of case management. These 36 courts handle approximately 25 percent of the active court cases in Afghanistan and employ 320 judges. Thus far, approximately 62 judges (including four female judges) and 131 court administrators (including 13 women) have been trained to operate the new case management system. By the end of August 2008, the Afghanistan Court Administration System rolls out to all 392 courts in the country.